UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1998/119
12 March 1998

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-fourth session
Item 20 of the provisional agenda

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Children in armed conflict

Interim report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Olara A. Otunnu, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/107

SUMMARY

The Graça Machel Report presented a disturbing and compelling account of the abominations being committed today against children in theatres of conflict all over the world. This is so in spite of the existence of a formidable body of international instruments and local norms. Indeed this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of a landmark instrument in this context - the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Special Representative believes that the most important and pressing challenge today is how to translate these standards and commitments into action that can make a tangible difference to the fate of children exposed to danger on the ground. This means, above all, concerted political action at both the international and national levels. Clearly, the time has come to make the protection and welfare of children - all our children - a common cause that can unite us across the boundaries of our political orientations, religious affiliations and cultural traditions. The Special Representative will work with all concerned partners for the promotion and realization of this project.

GE.98-10923 (E)

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Introduction

1. Since the 1990 World Summit for Children, the United Nations has sought to draw international attention to the horrendous plight of children affected by armed conflict. In 1993, following a recommendation by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the General Assembly adopted resolution 48/157 recommending that the Secretary-General appoint an independent expert to study the impact of armed conflict on children. Ms. Graça Machel, former Minister of Education and First Lady of Mozambique, was appointed the Secretary-General's expert, charged with the task of undertaking the study with the special support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Centre for Human Rights. In 1996, following two years of extensive research, regional consultations and field visits, Ms. Machel submitted her report, entitled "Impact of armed conflict on children" (A/51/306 and Add.1), to the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.

2. The Machel Report provided the first comprehensive assessment of the multiple ways in which children are abused and brutalized in the context of war. It set out findings and recommendations for action in several areas, including child soldiers, refugee and internally displaced children, sexual exploitation and gender-based violence, landmines and unexploded ordnance, the impact of sanctions on children, health and nutrition, psychological recovery and social reintegration, education, demilitarization and reconstruction.

3. In response to the Machel Report, the General Assembly adopted resolution 51/77 in which it recommended the appointment of a special representative of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children. The resolution also called upon States and institutions concerned to provide voluntary contributions in support of the work of the Special Representative.

4. In September 1997, the Secretary-General appointed Mr. Olara A. Otunnu as his Special Representative for a term of three years. In announcing this appointment, the Secretary-General underscored the urgent need for a public advocate and moral voice on behalf of children whose rights, protection and welfare have been and are being violated in the context of armed conflict.

5. This interim report is being submitted to the Commission on Human Rights pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/107. A full report will be presented to the fifty-third session of the General Assembly later in the year.

I. CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT: THE CONTEXT

6. As the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations underlines in its famous opening words, our first duty is to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". In this we have failed profoundly. Not only are millions of children still the victims of war, far too often they are its principal targets and even its instruments. At this moment, in approximately 50 countries around the world, children are suffering from the effects of conflict and its aftermath.

7. For all the children deliberately massacred or caught in crossfire or maimed by anti-personnel landmines, many more have been deprived of their physical, mental and emotional needs in the context of societies long at war. Millions have lost their homes and their parents, not to r tion years of education and socialization. Some have been permanently matized by the events they have witnessed and experienced. In today's internecine conflicts, children are specifically targeted in strategies to eliminate the next generation of potential adversaries. To the same end, children, and especially girls, have been made the targets of sexual abuse and gender-based violence on a large scale. Most cynically, children have been compelled to become instruments of war, recruited or kidnapped to become child soldiers, forced to give violent expression to the hatreds of adults. In all, an estimated 2 million children have been killed in situations of armed conflict since 1987, while three times that number have been seriously injured or permanently disabled. Countless more have been psychologically scarred and socially dislocated.

8. This brutal reality has been exacerbated by a qualitative change in the nature and scope of conflicts in recent times. Today's conflicts are primarily internal, often fought by multiple, semi-autonomous armed groups within existing State boundaries. The international rules of warfare, which have governed inter-State wars fought by regular armies, are routinely ignored in these situations of "total war". Often protracted, such conflicts can expose successive generations of children to horrendous violence.

9. Against a backdrop of increasingly accessible and destructive conventional weapons and ordnance, many of these conflicts pit compatriot against compatriot, neighbour against neighbour. They are often characterized by the demonization of the "enemy community" and the orchestration of vicious hate campaigns. In the intense and intimate setting of today's internecine warfare, the village has become the battlefield and civilian populations the primary target. In the First World War, civilians counted for some 5 per cent of casualties. In the Second World War that figure rose to 48 per cent. Today up to 90 per cent of conflict casualties around the world are civilians. A large and increasing number of these are children.

10. At the heart of this growing phenomenon of mass violence and social disintegration is a crisis of values. Perhaps the most fundamental loss a society can suffer is the collapse of its own value system. Many societies exposed to protracted conflicts have seen their community values radically undermined if not shattered altogether. This has given rise to an "ethical vacuum", a setting in which international standards are ignored with impunity and where local value systems have lost their sway.

11. The international community has an obligation to be concerned about the protection of all non-combatants caught in the midst of violent conflicts. Yet there is an urgent need to focus special attention on the plight of children. They are the ones least responsible for the conflicts, yet most vulnerable to their excesses. Children, as the most innocent and powerless victims of war, require special protection.

12. Children represent the future of human civilization and the future of every society. To permit them to be used as pawns in warfare, whether as

targets or perpetrators, is to cast a shadow on the future. From generation to generation, violence begets violence, as the abused grow up to become abusers. Children who are thus violated carry the scars of fear and hatred in their hearts and minds. Forced to learn to kill instead of pursuing education, the children of conflict lack the knowledge and skills needed to build their futures and the futures of their communities. For society, the lives destroyed and the opportunities lost could have a devastating effect on its long-term stability and development.

II. TAKING NORMS AND VALUES SERIOUSLY

13. As noted above, the abominations against children that we are currently witnessing in so many theatres of conflict around the world are due in large measure to a normative crisis at both the international and local levels. The traditional limits on the conduct of warfare - international instruments as well as local injunctions and taboos - are being cast aside. Clearly, the development and codification of these local and global norms is only the first step. To be meaningful, they must be respected and applied. The immense effort involved in the creation of international instruments and standards comes to naught if adoption is not followed by application. Similarly, the rich well of history and traditions from which local values spring means little if those norms are discarded when most needed. In his work, the Special Representative will stress the need to turn principle into practice, reminding all parties concerned, including non-State actors, that international and local standards of conduct should be resurrected and respected.

International instruments

14. Over the past 50 years, the nations of the world have developed and ratified an impressive series of international human rights and humanitarian instruments. Several of these address the rights, protection and welfare of children. The most pertinent are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Geneva Conventions (1949), along with their Additional Protocols. The latter contain some 25 articles specifically pertaining to children. Protocol I stipulates that children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of assault during conflict. Article 3, common to all four Conventions, is the cornerstone of the protection of civilians in internal conflicts and is binding on all parties to a conflict, regardless of their relationship to the State. Its fundamental guarantees are supplemented by Protocol II. Article 4.3 of Protocol II is devoted exclusively to children, enjoining that they "be provided with the care and aid they require". The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most universally ratified international instrument, calls for the protection of children's right to life, education, health, and other fundamental needs. These provisions apply equally in times of armed conflict as in times of peace.

15. However, the value of these provisions is limited to the extent to which they are applied. Words on paper cannot save children in peril. The role of the Special Representative will be to ensure that the international community

does not forget that its obligation encompasses not only the invocation of norms but, more important, the exertion of pressure to implement those norms and prevent the abuse and brutalization of children.

Local value systems

16. In addition to these international instruments, all societies can draw on their own local value systems, including a normative order governing civic relations and the conduct of war. Societies throughout history have recognized the special obligation to protect children from harm. Even in times of conflict, fundamental values and ethical standards were respected. Distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable practices were maintained, with taboos and injunctions proscribing indiscriminate targeting of civilian populations, especially children and women.

17. Increasingly, however, especially during periods of protracted conflict, we are witnessing a breakdown of traditional norms and social codes of behaviour, with horrendous consequences for the civilian population. In the resulting "ethical vacuum" anything goes. Distinctions between civilians and combatants have broken down. Children, women, the elderly - all have become fair game in the single-minded struggle for power.

18. In such situations, the Special Representative shall encourage the revival of these critically important local value systems, the values that promote the rights, protection and welfare of children. In particular, the role of institutions and community structures that normally provide a sense of ethical rootedness, such as parents, extended families, elders, teachers, schools and religious institutions, should be supported and strengthened.

III. PROMOTING PREVENTION, PROTECTION AND REHABILITATION

19. A serious and systematic effort by all concerned parties - from Governments to the United Nations system to civil society organizations to private citizens - is needed to address the abominations being committed against children in the context of armed conflict. As an advocate on behalf of these children, the Special Representative will work to spearhead that effort. He will combine normative, political and humanitarian strategies in efforts to promote prevention, protection and rehabilitation for the benefit of children.

20. The first step is prevention. Prevention entails strengthening the normative foundation of societies and mobilizing public opinion in order to create a social and political climate that is capable of impeding abuse against children. Second, the protection of children in zones of active conflict is the most visible and daunting challenge. In addition to their right to life and physical security, children require continued access to relief, health and educational services. Third, and equally important, is the need for healing and reintegration of children in the aftermath of violent conflict. The provision of physical, spiritual, and emotional care to children whose lives have been shattered by conflict must constitute an important component of programmes for post-conflict recovery. In this context, the Special Representative will develop the following activities:

(a) Public advocacy. The Special Representative will give a public voice to children who have been victimized by the chaos, cruelty and lawlessness that characterize contemporary armed conflicts. He will work to raise greater public and official awareness of international instruments and local norms that provide for the rights, protection and welfare of children, even as he highlights the horrific impact of conflict on them. He will be a public advocate and a voice for prevention, protection and rehabilitation. The Special Representative will seek to draw official and public attention to these abominations against children and mobilize action through various activities, including field visits, media outreach, addressing opinion leaders and policy makers, and other awareness-raising strategies;

(b) Promoting concrete initiatives. In situations of active violence where the security and well-being of children are seriously endangered, the Special Representative will engage in political and humanitarian diplomacy, proposing concrete initiatives to prevent or mitigate the suffering of children. He will, in effect, serve as a facilitator and a resource for the agencies, funds, programmes, offices, bodies and mechanisms which operate on the ground. He will work with them, for example, to unblock difficult political situations and to seek access to civilian populations in distress, the worst affected of whom are always children and women. This sensitive political role will require close coordination with partners within and outside the United Nations community, especially the relief and humanitarian organizations whose work on the ground would be facilitated by such initiatives;

(c) Mobilizing a coordinated response to post-conflict needs. In countries that are emerging from conflict, the Special Representative will highlight the needs of children and women whose lives have been shattered by war. Cessation of hostilities does not mean that war is over, particularly for children who have been extensively exposed to the culture of violence. Only with a systematic programme of healing and reintegration into society will the cycle of violence be broken. The healing and rehabilitation needs of children should therefore constitute a central theme and not an afterthought of post-conflict peace-building programmes. The Special Representative will work to promote this concern with agencies, funds, programmes, offices, bodies and mechanisms of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. Some of the issues and needs that should be addressed in a collaborative manner include the demobilization of child soldiers and their social reintegration, the return and reintegration of displaced and refugee children, mine-clearance and mine-awareness programmes, psychological recovery, educational and vocational training, and issues of juvenile justice.

IV. BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

21. To advance these objectives, the Special Representative will work to broaden the ownership of this agenda and seek the participation and collaboration of key actors from several sectors, official and non-official. To carry out a broad strategy of advocacy and collaborative action, he will seek to build partnerships with entities from within and beyond the United Nations. Each partner, by virtue of its particular comparative advantage, has a significant role to play in coordinated action to ensure the rights, protection and welfare of children affected by conflict.

22. Among the key partners will be the following:

(a) Governments. The most important responsibility for applying international norms and domestic standards lies with Governments. While international human rights and humanitarian instruments are genuine landmarks and provide a basis for action to protect children victimized by conflict, the gap between these norms and their observance on the ground is unacceptably wide and growing. The primary task of bridging this gap lies with Governments and intergovernmental organizations. The Special Representative therefore calls on all Governments to exercise their responsibilities more fully and consistently, to observe local norms and international instruments within their domestic jurisdictions and, at the international level, to apply concerted political and diplomatic pressure on those who systematically violate the rights and protection of children;

(b) The United Nations system. The role of the Special Representative will be that of a catalyst and advocate, highlighting this agenda and fostering concerted action on it within the United Nations system. The main responsibility for promoting the rights, protection and welfare of children rests with the agencies, funds, programmes, offices, bodies and mechanisms that have the expertise, resources and presence on the ground. The Special Representative will complement the activities of these bodies through public advocacy, and appropriate political and humanitarian initiatives. When they adopt a concerted approach towards a common cause, such as the protection or rehabilitation of children, United Nations agencies, funds, programmes, offices, bodies and mechanisms can have a significant impact. In support of the Secretary-General's efforts to streamline United Nations activities both at Headquarters and field levels, the Special Representative has begun to liaise very closely with all relevant United Nations departments, funds, programmes, agencies, offices, bodies and mechanisms in order to develop a common approach on the rights, protection and welfare of children in the context of armed conflict. The Special Representative is also working through existing consultative mechanisms in order to place this issue within the mainstream of United Nations policy-making and programme activities;

(c) Regional organizations. Promoting the rights and welfare of children in situations of armed conflict is an agenda that should be developed with the active participation of regional and subregional organizations. A regional or subregional arrangement can provide a more concrete and local framework for the application of the universal norms and international instruments highlighted above. The Special Representative will encourage the development of appropriate regional and subregional commitments and initiatives. He will work to build strong partnerships with several regional and subregional organizations, including the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Council of Europe, the European Union (EU), the League of Arab States, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Organization of American States (OAS), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). This circle of partners should include important multilateral political-cultural associations based on shared historical affinities, such as la Francophonie and the Commonwealth;

(d) Civil society organizations. An important premise of the work of the Special Representative is the need to widen the ownership of this agenda beyond official actors. Civil society organizations, including humanitarian and relief organizations and the human rights community, women's organizations, religious leaders, civic and youth associations, as well as key actors from the private sector, are important partners in the broad movement to protect children's rights and welfare in the context of armed conflict. Non-governmental organizations are particularly important in this regard because of their commitment, expertise and activities on the ground. The Special Representative will encourage civil society organizations to work to build greater awareness and to mobilize for action on this issue. He will also encourage organizations with relief, humanitarian and development capacities on the ground to develop more focused and coordinated programmes to protect the rights and respond to the needs of children during and in the aftermath of conflict;

(e) The media. The media have come to play a central role in informing and influencing public opinion at all levels. The media will have an important role to play in building public awareness about the abuse and brutalization of children in the context of armed conflict. The Special Representative will therefore make particular efforts to inform and engage the media on this issue, so that they can play a more effective role in mobilizing both public and official opinion.

V. FOCUSING ON SELECTED THEMES

23. The Machel Report highlighted a wide range of important issues affecting the rights and welfare of children in the context of armed conflict. Given the breadth of this agenda and practical constraints, there is need to select some areas for concentration of efforts. The following are some of the issues to which the Special Representative will give priority attention at this stage.

Participation of children in armed conflict

24. Children simply have no part in warfare. The Special Representative will seize every available occasion and forum to underscore this fundamental principle.

25. An alarming trend in recent years is the increasing participation, direct and indirect, of children in armed conflict. It is estimated that up to a quarter of a million children under the age of 18 are serving as combatants in government armed forces or armed opposition groups in ongoing conflicts. Indeed, the development and proliferation of lightweight automatic weapons has made it possible for very young children to bear and use arms. Many more children are being used in indirect ways which are more difficult to measure, such as cooks, messengers and porters. Children have also been used for mine clearance, spying and suicide bombing.

26. The Special Representative will seek to mobilize public opinion and political pressure against this growing trend. In particular, he will advocate for concerted action against the military recruitment of children under the agreed age limit. In this connection, he supports current efforts

to raise the legal age of participation in hostilities to 18 years, through the adoption of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Similarly, he supports the designation of the recruitment of children under 15 and their participation in hostilities as a war crime in the proposed statute for a permanent international criminal court.

27. The Special Representative will also draw attention to the various political and socio-economic conditions that often facilitate the recruitment and participation of children in armed conflict. He will work to promote more effective response to the needs of child soldiers in post-conflict situations.

Sexual abuse and gender-based violence

28. There is growing evidence that rape and sexual abuse have, in many places, become an intrinsic part of armed conflict strategies. The breakdown of social value systems and the disintegration of families and communities in times of war leave women and girls especially vulnerable to sexual violence. The practice of rape as a weapon of armed conflict and ethnic cleansing must be ended and its perpetrators brought to justice. Children affected by gender-based violence also include those who have witnessed the rape of a family member. The Special Representative will work to raise greater awareness of and call for action against these abuses. In this connection, he supports the inclusion of rape and any other forms of sexual violence in international and internal armed conflict as a war crime under the jurisdiction of the permanent international criminal court. He will also promote the need for special health and psychological care for victims in the context of post-conflict rehabilitation programmes.

Mine awareness and rehabilitation of child victims

29. Civilians, including children, are exposed to the danger of approximately 100 million landmines left buried in more than 68 countries. It is estimated that anti-personnel landmines kill or maim about 26,000 persons a year, a large proportion of them being children. Millions of items of unexploded ordnance also represent additional hazards. The signing in December 1997, by 122 countries in Ottawa, of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and Their Destruction is a milestone achievement for the international community. The treaty now must enter into force and be effectively implemented. In the immediate term, the Special Representative will emphasize the need for more rapid progress in mine clearance, greater support for mine awareness programmes for children, and rehabilitation programmes to help child victims. He will work with key partners to address these concerns, especially in post-conflict situations.

Integrating standards into United Nations operations

30. The United Nations and its agencies, particularly those with operational activities in the field, are important channels for building greater awareness and encouraging more consistent application of human rights and humanitarian norms to protect children affected by armed conflict. In order to achieve this, United Nations agencies, programmes, funds, bodies, offices and mechanisms should be encouraged to more systematically integrate these

standards into their policies, procedures and operations, providing guidelines and training to their personnel whenever necessary, as well as setting the best example through their own conduct. This pertains to all United Nations personnel, civilian and military. The Special Representative applauds existing efforts in this regard and will encourage all United Nations bodies to further build into their internal cultures and operational activities greater awareness of and sensitivity to the rights, protection, and welfare of children.

Impact of sanctions on children

31. In light of concerns expressed in the Machel Report and other recent reports about the ill-effects of sanctions regimes on children, the Special Representative will work closely with relevant United Nations agencies, programmes, funds, offices, bodies and mechanisms and non-governmental organizations to explore preventive measures, such as child-focused humanitarian exemptions, child impact assessments, and more targeted sanctions regimes. In addition, he will explore more effective ways to protect children living under sanctions regimes and measures to ensure their recovery from the adverse effects.

VI. LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

32. Since his appointment in September 1997, the Special Representative has taken a number of steps to lay the groundwork for his activities. The following are some of the initial steps he has taken in the course of the last several months:

(a) Outreach and advocacy:

(i) Consulting with Governments. The Special Representative has held discussions with senior political and government leaders from a number of countries. He has visited more than 15 capitals in this connection. The principal objectives of these visits and discussions have been to highlight the agenda outlined above, to mobilize political support for it, and to elicit the perspectives of various Governments on his proposed activities. Various Governments have expressed their commitment to use their diplomatic influence and development and humanitarian policies to more systematically promote the rights, protection and welfare of children affected by armed conflict;

(ii) Establishing contacts with leaders of affected countries. The Special Representative has held discussions with government leaders from several countries affected by armed conflicts to inform them of his mandate and proposed activities, to seek their cooperation in the conduct of his work, to discuss the plight of children in each situation, and to prepare for field visits to those countries. Following these initial contacts, plans are now under way for the Special Representative to visit some of the affected countries to assess directly the conditions of children in the midst of ongoing conflicts or in post-conflict situations;

(iii) Developing a framework of collaboration within the United Nations. The Special Representative has conducted a series of consultations with the heads of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) in order to develop a framework of institutional and operational collaboration in support of this agenda. As a follow-up to these discussions, a regular process of informal consultations has now been established with senior officials from UNICEF, UNHCR, OCHA and OHCHR, for the purpose of reviewing cooperation and seeking advice on an ongoing basis. The Special Representative will also use his participation in the Executive Committee on Peace and Security (ECPS), the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA), the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to ensure that the issue of the rights, protection, and welfare of children affected by armed conflict is fully addressed in the relevant policy discussions and programme activities on a system-wide basis;

(iv) Discussions with leaders of regional organizations. The Special Representative has met and held discussions with the Secretaries-General of the OAU, the OSCE and the OAS, and with the EU Commissioners for Development and Humanitarian Affairs, in order to present this agenda to them and seek their support in its development. The EU, in particular, has expressed a strong interest in working closely with the Special Representative to make the issue of children affected by armed conflict an important item on its agenda, as well as to collaborate actively on humanitarian initiatives and post-conflict projects. In addition, following discussions between the Special Representative and government officials in London, the United Kingdom has offered to use the occasion of its current Presidency of the European Union to highlight this issue. To this end, the United Kingdom has now convened a high-level meeting of Governments and key NGOs, to be held in London in June 1998, to discuss this agenda;

(v) Engaging non-governmental organizations. The Special Representative has now held meetings with the leadership of virtually all the major international non-governmental organizations in different parts of the world, in particular from the humanitarian, human rights and development sectors, that are active in this domain. He has sought their perspectives and active participation in shaping this agenda. Several NGOs have undertaken to develop new programme activities on the ground and to launch special public awareness campaigns in their countries in response to this agenda;

(vi) Outreach to media and opinion leaders. The Special Representative has held a series of briefings for the international and national

media to sensitize them about the abuse and brutalization of children in the context of armed conflict and inform them about his activities. These briefings have generated broad media coverage in different parts of the world. As follow-up, some key international media outlets have offered to work in collaboration with the Special Representative to develop special programmes and features focusing on some of the themes highlighted in this agenda. The Special Representative has also made particular efforts to get this message into important circles of opinion leaders. He has addressed several major international gatherings of political and opinion leaders in different parts of the world. More such encounters are planned in the context of ongoing awareness building and public advocacy;

(b) Selected initial projects

(i) Input into the draft statute for a permanent international criminal court. The Special Representative plans to play an active role in the ongoing deliberations for the establishment of a permanent international criminal court. His concern is to ensure that the rights and interests of children affected by armed conflict are fully taken into account in the drafting of the statute of the court. He is now consulting with various delegations and relevant NGOs in preparation for his active participation in the forthcoming final session of the Preparatory Committee in New York and the Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries in Rome next June. Among the child rights questions at issue in the drafting of the statute are the designation of the use of children in hostilities as a war crime; the classification of rape and any other forms of sexual violence as a war crime; the designation of the age of criminal responsibility; and the protection of child victims and child witnesses in the prosecution of war crimes;

(ii) Strengthening standards for peacekeeping personnel. The Special Representative and the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations have held several discussions on the issue of standards, procedures and training relating to the conduct of peacekeeping personnel. They share a common commitment to reviewing and strengthening existing arrangements; they have constituted a consultative group to this end. The Special Representative has also been in contact with several interested delegations, United Nations agencies and programmes and NGOs to seek their perspectives and input. The Special Representative and the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations intend to complete this exercise and to issue its outcome soon;

(iii) Developing pilot projects in post-conflict situations. The Special Representative has stressed the importance of a concerted and more effective response to the needs of children and women in the aftermath of conflict. He plans to propose two or three post-conflict cases that may serve as pilot projects for the development of "best practices" and more systematic application of

"lessons learned". Several key actors, including UNICEF, UNDP, the World Bank, the EU and several Governments, have expressed support for this idea and have indicated their strong interest in participating in the proposed pilot projects;

(iv) Strengthening the knowledge base. One of the first casualties of war is often the truth. To be effective in his work, the Special Representative needs to have ready access to reliable and timely information. The Special Representative is working to build a process for information-gathering, relying on a network of United Nations agencies, research institutions, non-governmental organizations and the academic community. Much of the information on children affected by armed conflict at present is diffuse, segmented, and not readily accessible to those who need it. A more comprehensive system is needed. Plans are under way for establishing an electronic database and a Website for this purpose. One of the objectives of this database will also be to make available information relating to "lessons learned" and principles of "best practice";

(c) Setting up a secretariat for the Special Representative. Since his appointment in September 1997, the Special Representative has been engaged in efforts to get a secretariat established and functioning to support his activities; this has been a particular challenge. An office has been provided at United Nations Headquarters in New York. At the time of writing this report, however, the secretariat for the Special Representative is not yet fully functional and staff have not yet been recruited for this purpose. The Special Representative very much hopes that efforts presently under way will soon remedy this situation.

33. The Special Representative has also spent time mobilizing voluntary contributions to support his work. He is very grateful to several Governments and United Nations programmes that have responded generously with initial contributions. These have been most helpful and made it possible for the Special Representative to launch his activities. A trust fund has now been established at the United Nations Secretariat in New York for receiving voluntary contributions from Governments and other institutions.

34. In his report to the General Assembly, the Special Representative will provide further information on the status of the Trust Fund and staff support.

Note: The statistics cited in this interim report were compiled from UNICEF sources and materials.